

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2036

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, SNAR, HO
SUBJECT: NARCOTICS SCANDAL: INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE FORMED

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 1840 (DTG 172116Z APR 78), (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1963
(DTG 241959Z APR 78)

1. FOLLOWING CHARGES OF HIGH LEVEL MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTICS
TRAFFICKING BY LT JUAN ANGEL BARAHONA, HEAD OF THE POLICE
INTERPOL UNIT, AT AN APRIL 22 PRESS CONFERENCE, THE ARMED FORCES
ESTABLISHED A COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE. COMMUNIQUE NO. 43 DATED
APRIL 25 EMPHASIZED THAT THE ARMED FORCES COMMANDER HAD AT NO
TIME RECEIVED DOCUMENTS PROVING THE
GUILT OF ANY OFFICERS AND THAT HE HAD ONLY BEEN GIVEN (SELF-
SERVING) STATEMENTS BY VARIOUS PERSONS. THIS SITUATION,
ACCORDING TO COMMUNIQUE, HAS CHANGED WITH PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY
BARAHONA THAT OFFICERS WITH STARS (I.E. MAJOR TO GENERAL) ARE
INVOLVED. COMMUNIQUE PROMISES THAT ANY MILITARY FOUND
INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTS WILL BE TURNED OVER TO THE COURTS
FOR PROSECUTION.

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2. ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, WHEN FACED WITH DIFFICULT PROBLEMS, THE
ARMED FORCES HAVE APPOINTED INVESTIGATING COMMISSIONS. NAMES OF
PERSONS WHO WILL BE MEMBERS OF COMMISSION ARE NOT YET KNOWN.

3. THIS LATEST DEVELOPMENT BEGAN AFTER A REPRESENTATIVE OF JUAN
RAMON MATTA LOPEZ (AKA MATTA BALLASTEROS) CLAIMED IN A

NOTARIZED STATEMENT SENT FROM BOGOTA THAT HE WAS FORCED TO PAY NEARLY \$20,000 TO BARAHONA TO BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. LT. BARAHONA DENIED THE EXTORTION, BUT ADMITTED TO HAVING HELD THE MAN PRISONER AND HAVING TORTURED HIM. BARAHONA LASHED OUT IN THE MEDIA CLAIMING HE WAS BEING MADE THE SCRAPEGOAT FOR OTHERS, AND CLEARLY IMPLICATED FORMER NATIONAL INVESTIGATION DEPT. (DIN) HEAD, MAJOR ARMANDO CALIDONIO. AT LEAST ONE RADIO COMMENTATOR HAS ALSO SPECULATED ON THE POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT OF CALIDONIO'S SUPERIOR AT THE TIME AS NATIONAL POLICE (FUSEP) COMMANDER, LT. COL. JUAN ANGEL ARIAS, NOW THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: BARAHONA'S SENSATIONAL CHARGES HAVE FORCED THE ARMED FORCES TO SQUARELY FACE THE LONG STANDING RUMORS OF HIGH LEVEL MILITARY OFFICERS BEING INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING (REF A). THE FOCUS OF PUBLIC ATTENTION HAS CHANGED FROM THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FERRARI COUPLE TO THE CHARGES OF MILITARY CORRUPTION. PUBLIC REACTION COULD BE ESPECIALLY STRONG GIVEN THE GENERALLY UNSOPHISTICATED NATURE OF HONDURAN SOCIETY WHICH HAS TENDED TO REACT EMOTIONALLY AGAINST NARCOTICS, WHILE ACCEPTING MORE "ROUTINE" CORRUPTION WITH LESS CONCERN.

5. THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECULATION THAT THIS BREWING SCANDAL WAS ONE FACTOR IN LT. COL. ARIAS' NOT BECOMING ACTING CHIEF OF STATE DURING GENERAL MELGAR'S ABSENCE (REF B). HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO TRUE ARIAS IS ATTENDING A CONFERENCE IN CARACAS THIS WEEK. OTHERS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT GENERAL MELGAR'S VISIT TO THE U.S. FOR A MEDICAL CHECK-UP WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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TIMED TO GIVE ARMED FORCES COMMANDER GENERAL POLICARPO PAZ A FREE HAND FOR INVESTIGATION. WHATEVER THE CASE, THE INVESTIGATING COMMISSION MUST NOW CAUTERIZE THE DAMAGE OR FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF A FURTHER EROSION OF THE ARMED FORCES' REPUTATION ALONG WITH INCREASED INSTABILITY AS CALLS GROW FOR A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE GROW. END COMMENT.
JARAMILLO

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